

declared the 'International Year of the Indigenous Peoples of the World' (*Encounter of Two Worlds* 1989: 2), a call to consciousness of what is increasingly known as 'the fourth world', the term originally applied to that *quartus mundus* of America which so disrupted the tripartite maps of medieval Europe. And, perhaps more radically, many indigenous groups in the continent are joining forces in a process of 'autodescubrimiento' which will find even the language of 'encounter' offensively neutral. Meanwhile, perhaps most radical of all, growing realization of the time-depth of Middle American agriculture and architecture will begin to suggest that the term 'New World' might have got attached to the wrong continent.

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Portrayal and Betrayal: The Colonial Gaze in Seventeenth Century Brazil

Peter Mason

Traditionally, anthropologists have never been very interested in painting. Despite the fact that the word 'ethnography' itself derives from the Greek words for 'people' and 'painting', the verbal has generally predominated over the visual. Where iconographic sources were exploited, this was often through lack of anything better. Particularly in the case of peoples like certain South American tribes who are no longer in existence, any pictorial record that survived might be utilised as a source of ethnographic information to support, explicate or complement written records.

If the main purpose was to reduce visual sources to a documentary value in terms of what they purported to portray, it is to some extent understandable that visual representations of other peoples and cultures were treated with circumspection. At a time when anthropology was coming to lean more and more on standards of descriptive precision borrowed from other disciplines, the reverse movement could be detected in certain schools of painting. For instance, while sixteenth century European representations of Turks may claim a fairly high degree of documentary ethnographic accuracy, eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings of harems, languorous females in exotic landscapes, wild dervishes and fierce warriors indicate a relatively untroubled gliding into the stereotyped fantasies of Orientalism (P. Vandenbroeck 1987: 27). While descriptive accounts came more and more to eliminate mythical elements from their midst, visual portrayals seemed to be moving away from a rough and ready ethnography in the direction of myth formation.

However, the last two decades or so have witnessed a shift of interest in the treatment of written accounts in certain quarters. Attention has moved from a stress on the documentary value of texts which purport to show something that they themselves are not, to the material nature of the production of texts: not what they say, but what they show, as Wittgenstein put it (cf. D. Silverman & B. Torode 1980). In

visual terms, we might speak of a related shift from portrayal to betrayal: not what they purport to represent, but what the eye as a performing agent constructs. This tendency, it should be added, is heavily influenced by psycho-analytic theory¹ and by semiotics (cf. P. Simons 1988). The visual images we confront are not just portrayals; they betray the activity of the eye and the gaze in the construction of worlds which, however their problematical relation to 'reality' is to be thematised,² are by definition 'imaginary' worlds. They are *fictions*, in the way in which Foucault claimed never to have written anything but fictions (1980: 193).

To be fair, it should be remembered that Lévi-Strauss did briefly point out the importance for anthropologists of reading the iconological studies by Erwin Panofsky (1973: 324). In particular, one of Lévi-Strauss' students, Bernadette Bucher, has produced an example of how structural analysis might be applied to an iconographical corpus - in this case, the late sixteenth century compilation of travellers' descriptions compiled and published by the De Bry family as *Great Voyages*. She treats the iconographical corpus in the way in which an anthropologist might tackle an ethnographical corpus. In fact, she calls the European iconography a non-verbal mythology (B. Bucher 1981).

This article deals with a series of paintings purporting to be representations of Brazilian Indians (figs 1-9). They were painted in the 1640s by the North Netherlands painter Albert Eckhout, and may be said to 'epitomize both Eckhout's manner as a painter and his distinctive vision of Brazil' (P. Whitehead 1985: 130). These paintings are our realia. After a brief description of them as artefacts, I shall first see how far a documentary approach in terms of portrayal takes us, before turning to the ways in which they betray their specific European, social and gender-based origins. In the final section a first sketch will be made of the relation between the particular sexual idiom which these paintings display and the tropes of colonialist discourse. It will be suggested that the eye of the colonial gaze is tied up with the ego-centric I that is at the centre of Eurocentrism.

When Alexander the Great invaded India in 326 BC, he took with him

¹ For instance, a large part of Jacques Lacan's 1964 seminar dealt with the gaze (J. Lacan 1979: 67-119).

² On the question of painting and truth see J. Derrida (1978).

a team of intellectuals to record his expedition and the countries he passed through (P. Pédech 1984). Similarly, the 'Plinius of the late sixteenth century', Ulisse Aldrovandi, planned to send an army of writers and painters to compile a vast encyclopaedic work on the New World.³ Hence the humanist prince Johan Maurits von Nassau was only following these illustrious examples when he was dispatched to Brazil to act as Governor General of the Dutch colony there from 1637 to 1644.⁴ Though it is not clear how many artists he took with him nor who they all were, some names at any rate of the experts who accompanied him are certain: the natural scientist Georg Markgraf (on whom see P. Whitehead 1979); the physician Willem Pies; and at least two painters, Frans Post and Albert Eckhout. Frans Post is well known for his landscape paintings, and he and Albert Eckhout appear to have had a division of labour. While Post was to record the Brazilian scenery, Eckhout was to paint the flora and fauna, including human portraits. It has even been suggested that this division of labour might have been carried out on a single canvas, a practice which was not uncommon at this time: H. van Gelder (1960) detected the hand of Eckhout in the foreground vegetation and human and animal figures on landscapes painted by Post, and, vice versa, the existence of landscape backgrounds by Post on paintings attributed to Eckhout.

Probably the best known painting by Albert Eckhout (ca. 1607-1665)⁵ hangs in the Mauritshuis in the Hague. It is of two life-sized tortoises of a type (*Testudo denticulata*) which was unknown in European art before Eckhout introduced it (H. van Gelder 1960).⁶ Besides a mass of natural history sketches, which disappeared during World War II and are now preserved in Cracow, Eckhout's work also includes a series of oil paintings of human figures, which now hang in the National Museum of Copenhagen (ills. 1-9).⁷ Eight of the paintings are all more or less the same size, measuring approximately 265cm by approx. 160cm; they consist of 4 pairs: two pairs of Brazilian Indians, one Black

³ See his *Discorso naturale* of 1572/73, reproduced in S. Tugnoli Pattaro 1981: 173 ff.

⁴ For a history of this period, see. C. R. Boxer (1954)

⁵ The attribution of this unsigned painting to Eckhout is by van Gelder; Whitehead and Boeseman 'can see no definite evidence that the tortoises were painted by Eckhout' (1989: 94).

⁶ The painting is reproduced in B. Broos 1987: 127; P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 292.

⁷ Reproduced in B. Dam-Mikkelsen & T. Lundbaek 1980; P. Whitehead 1985; P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989.

African pair, and two half-bloods (a Mameluc and a Mulatto).⁸ There is also a ninth painting, a horizontal composition (168cm x 294cm), depicting an Indian dance. Most of these paintings are signed by the artist and dated between 1641 and 1643.

These paintings were probably intended to hang in the great hall of Vrijburg, the residence which Johan Maurits had built to the east of Mauritsstad in Brazil, completed in 1642. Johan Maurits returned to the Netherlands in May 1644, where the Mauritshuis in The Hague was complete and waiting for him. However, none of the halls in the Mauritshuis was large enough to accommodate the entire series, and Johan Maurits had to make do with a number of frescoes painted along the walls of the staircases depicting 'life-like, all the heathen and barbaric nations, male and female Moors, negroes, Brazilians, Tapuyas, Hottentots and other savage nations who are all God's creatures', as Jacob de Hennin (1681) described them.⁹ No doubt some of these painted frescoes, which have been attributed to Leonard Bramer (Th. Lunsingh Scheurleer 1979), were based on the Eckhout paintings. They were all destroyed when the Mauritshuis was gutted by fire in 1704.

The redundancy of the large-scale Brazilian paintings in the Mauritshuis may have been one of the factors which prompted Johan Maurits to present them as part of a gift of 26 paintings to his cousin Frederick III, the king of Denmark, in 1654.¹⁰ The Eckhout paintings appear in the 1673/4 and later inventories of Frederick's *Kunstkamer*, and have remained in Copenhagen to the present day.

It should perhaps be pointed out that the Eckhout paintings are not the earliest full-length figure representations of exotic people in European art. The credit for this must go to the whole-length figure drawings made by the English artist John White, whose water colours of Algonkin Indians apparently followed sketches made in the 1580s, i.e.

⁸ According to Wagener, the term 'mulato' was applied to the offspring of a Negro mother and a European (i.e. Dutch or Portuguese) father; 'mameluca' was applied to the offspring of a Brazilian mother and a European father.

⁹ Beziet dan voor eerst langhs den opgangh deezer trappen geschildert ende naa't leven alle die Heidensche en Barbarische Natien, Mooren en Moorinnen, Negers, Braziliaanen, Tapoeiers, Hotten-totten, en andere wilde Natien; al mede Godts Schepzelen. Onder die soorten van wilde Tappoeiers, dat ook menscheeters zijn [...].

¹⁰ The initiative for negotiating the gift of the paintings was apparently taken by Admiral Lindenov, who had assured Johan Maurits that the gift would be acceptable to the king (P. Whitehead 1987: 154).

a good half century before the Eckhout paintings (P. Hulton & D. Quinn 1964). Of course, the tradition of graphic representations of the peoples of the New World goes back much further. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés had already turned to painting when faced with his inability to describe what he saw in words (cf. P. Mason 1989). In addition to many drawings of plants and animals, Oviedo prepared at least twenty ethnographic illustrations relating to Hispaniola, Central America, Peru and Patagonia. Their originality is certain; indeed, no previous models are known for any of them (W. Sturtevant 1976: 424). Mention should also be made of the drawings made by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564-1565, although only a single Le Moyne original is still extant - a miniature portrait of the son of a Timucuan chief (P. Hulton 1978: 198). Still, Eckhout was the first to make full-length paintings (R. Joppien 1979: 302 n. 37). The paintings as we know them are probably also based on sketches (P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 76-77).¹¹

Eckhout's paintings have never made the grade in art historical circles - 'No one would claim that Eckhout is a great artist' is the verdict of Peter Whitehead (1985: 134) -, which is no doubt why they hang today in an ethnographical collection instead of among the fine arts. They have always attracted interest and admiration for their ethnographical accuracy rather than any intrinsic artistic worth. Alexander von Humboldt admired their descriptive quality, and William Sturtevant has called them 'the first convincing European paintings of Indian physiognomy and body build' (1976: 419), a view which has been received favourably by another expert in the field of American iconography, Hugh Honour (1979: 295; cf. *idem* 1975: 83). In his thorough study of the artists in Johan Maurits' retinue, Rüdiger Joppien asserts:

All eight portraits are of immense ethnographical interest, not only for representing natives at a period from which very few records are known, but also because they allow for detailed exami-

¹¹ Although P. Ehrenreich's suggestion (1894: 81-82) that the originals can be found in Zacharias Wagener's *Thierbuch* has been refuted (R. Joppien 1979: 320 n. 118; cf. P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 48-50).

nation of artifacts, their construction and function. (R. Joppien 1979: 303).¹²

As for the most recent authoritative statements on the paintings, those of Peter Whitehead, he argues for the priority of Eckhout as a New World portraitist, demarcating his work sharply from the 'idealized types' of his predecessors, who did little more than to produce a vision of how a European might look if he painted his body, adorned himself with beads and stuck feathers in his hair (1985). As we have seen, the Copenhagen paintings are one remove away from Eckhout's own preliminary sketches, of which the same scholar has the following to say:

Eckhout's ten pencil sketches of Tapuyas stand as the first life studies of Amerindians, whether in North or South America, or at least the first that we know of, the first attempt by a competent European artist actually to record what he saw, virtually unsullied by European precepts of pose, body proportions or physiognomy. (P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 203).

As for the relationship between the sketches and the paintings, the same authors state that the paintings 'did not greatly distort the honesty of the first-hand observation' (*ibid.*). The tone is the same in Whitehead's verdict on an anonymous painting of Greenlanders in the same Copenhagen museum, which

[...] should be placed, together with the John White drawings and the Albert Eckhout paintings, in the very highest ethnohistorical category by those explaining the original people of the New World. (P. Whitehead 1987: 155).

The enthusiasm for the ethnohistorical accuracy of the Eckhout paintings is occasionally heightened by contrasting them with other work. For instance, Hugh Honour (1975: 83) contrasts them with the conventional figures in Bonaventura Peeters' scenes of imaginary America painted in the late 1640s, and Monika Kopplin (1987: 318) contrasts the objectivity and lack of pathos or romanticism in the Eckhout portraits with the bizarre exoticism of the work of a contem-

¹² Although none of the artifacts preserved in Copenhagen can be exactly matched with those in the Eckhout paintings: P. Whitehead 1979: 428 n. 22.

porary who knew Eckhout's work, Jan van Kessel (1626-1679), who combined Amerindian themes taken from Eckhout's work with a gamelan, Japanese masks and a tigress in a classicising allegorical painting, *Americque*, dating from 1666 (P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 90-94).

If we take this alleged ethnohistorical accuracy of the Eckhout paintings seriously, we are bound to ask who and what is being portrayed, particularly as far as the portraits of Amerindians are concerned. This question was already tackled by Paul Ehrenreich in an article published in 1894, in which his examination of the pictorial, literary and linguistic evidence led him to conclude:

The portraits left us by Maurits von Nassau are the oldest artistic representations of a wild people. The Tapuya were a Gê tribe, were known as Tarairyou or Otschucayona, and were probably related to the Patasho or Koropo, although they were by no means identical with them. (P. Ehrenreich, 1894: 90).

Whether these are in fact the oldest representations is a debatable issue. Ehrenreich, after all, was not familiar with two collections of drawings and sketches from Eckhout's hand when he made this assessment. But to concentrate on the problems of ethnographic classification, we can first ask who the Tarairyou are to whom Ehrenreich refers. In his article on the Tarairiu in the *Handbook of South American Indians*, Lowie (1963b) explains that the Tarairiu are only one among a group of 'Tapuya'.

So we have to turn our attention to the 'Tapuya'. Today doubt has been thrown on the identification of the 'Tapuya' with the Gê (D. Maybury-Lewis 1965), and the 'Tapuya' tend to be identified with the modern Canela or Krahó (J. Hemming 1984) as a people of hunters and gatherers who are noted for their swiftness of foot. The word 'Tapuya' itself is a Tupi term, which is supposed to mean 'Westerners' or 'enemies', according to Martius. It is thus not a self-ascription, but a label attached by one group (the Tupi) to refer to those who are definitely beyond the pale in their (Tupi) eyes. That is to say, 'Tapuya' means simply 'non-Tupi'. Consistently with this, the 'Tapuya' are denied any form of agriculture, which may simply be a reflection of the fact that they cultivated other plants than the manioc on which the Tupi depended. The allegation that they slept on the ground and not in hammocks is another feature which is not borne out by the early

sources. In short, the profile of the 'Tapuya' is little more than a negative image of the Tupi: they are what the Tupi are not. It is therefore doubtful whether it makes any sense to look for a unified 'Tapuya' ethnos at all. As Lowie sums up:

It seems hopeless to assign a definite linguistic meaning to the term "Tapuya" [...] ethnographically, there is hardly more warrant for considering all Tapuya in one category. (R. Lowie 1963a).

In other words, there is no 'Tapuya' culture. The term has no place in scientific usage, it should only be written between inverted commas, and its use should be confined to citations from writers of previous centuries.

A similar case of the constitution of an alleged group through the act of anthropological nomenclature is that of the so-called 'Ciboney', presumed to be the earliest inhabitants of the Caribbean islands. Very little is known about these people, and their culture is defined largely by the *absence* of traits which are known among their neighbours, such as pottery. There is no evidence of what any of the groups called themselves, if anything, and no likelihood that the different groups were united by a singular ethnic sense. Like the Tupi word 'Tapuya', the word 'Ciboney' may have been a disparaging term used by the dominant Arawakan-speaking culture on Hispaniola to refer to those who were not involved in the agricultural economy (P. Hulme 1986: 58).

The 'Tapuya', then, are an anthropological construct. We can gain some idea of the principles underlying this construct from the following brief description of the 'Tapuya' taken from a work written in 1618 by a sugar planter in Brazil, Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão:

These Tapuias live in the bush and have no villages or regular dwellings, nor do they even plant food to eat. They all live in the open country and subsist on the honey that they take from trees or that the bees make on the ground, as well as on game, which they kill in great abundance with their arrows. For this they keep the following order: they all go together in a group to set up their shelter in the spot that seems to them to be the best, erecting for this purpose a few grass huts of little value, and from there they go out to a distance of two or three leagues around to look for honey and game. As long as they find food they do not abandon that place, but when it begins to be scarce they at once move to another site,

where they do the same thing. In this fashion they carry on, always living in the fields, moving their locations without tiring themselves with working or cultivating the land, for their arrows are plow and hoe to them, and even their arrows they do not shoot with the bow as the rest of the heathen do. For taking an arrow in their hands, they insert it in a hollow cane, which they carry on a finger. They make such accurate shots and with such force that it is astonishing, so that the game almost never escapes if they shoot an arrow that way. A few days ago I saw one of them make a shot without a bow, and besides hitting the mark at which it was aimed, the arrow went right through a thick door, from one side to the other. They differ also in their speech, and the rest of the heathen do not understand them, for they have such a crack-jaw language. They wear their hair long like women, and they are generally so feared by all the other heathen that one Tapuia is enough to make many other Indians flee. And thus even a small number of them will enter very large villages confidently and take anything they want, with nobody so much as raising a hand against them, and the people will even let them carry their women off, so great is the fear they have of them. (A.F. Brandão 1986: 325-326).

This description of the 'Tapuya' is couched within a framework which implies a differentiation of the Brazilian Indians in terms of greater or lesser degrees of wildness. The source of this dichotomy is to be found in the Mediterranean concepts of the noble savage and the inhuman barbarian. Initially, the first European observers of the New World do not know in which of these two categories the native population is to be fitted, and both textual and iconographical representations waver between the positive and negative possibilities. Gradually the distinction is transported within the body of the Amerindian peoples themselves. They become internally differentiated: some are relatively civilised and others are totally uncivilised. For instance, Marc Lescarbot, part of whose work was translated into English as propaganda for the Virginia Company of London in 1609, singled out the tribes of Brazil as being beyond hope of civilisation (L. Pennington 1978: 185). 'Civilised' and 'uncivilised', of course, are loaded terms which reflect the vision of the colonisers. 'Civilised' means for them docile and amenable to European domination; 'uncivilised' means putting up a spirited resistance to this colonial endeavour. In the Caribbean area, this same distinction is made between Caribs and

Arawaks: in the persuasive definitions which are imposed on the native populations, and which bear scant relation to the self-ascriptions of these peoples themselves, the Arawaks are those who are prepared to accept the Spaniards, while the Caribs are those who defend their territory and way of life (P. Hulme 1986: 72). The anthropological nomenclature is a work of *Realpolitik*; it does not correspond to linguistic, cultural, ethnic or other categories.

In the Brazilian situation, the same principle is at work in the formulation of the definition of 'Tapuya'. A comparison of Eckhout's portraits of Tupi Indians (figs. 3-4) with those depicting 'Tapuya' (figs. 1-2) shows that the humanity of the latter is stunted or incomplete. The contrast is between wildness and savagery on the one hand and a cultivated habitat and elementary civility on the other. The series¹³ of Eckhout's paintings can thus be seen as showing the different grades of civility, ranging from the 'Tapuya' via the Tupi and Blacks to the mulattos and mestizos. The message behind the paintings would then be: 'These are our Tupi, blacks, mulattos and mestizos, recruits to civility who show some promise; and those are the Tapuyas, our irredeemable, infernal allies' (E. van den Boogaart 1979: 538). In this way it becomes possible to compare the 'message' of the paintings with the actual problems faced by the employees of the Dutch West India Company in their dealings with the Brazilian Indians, as E. van den Boogaart (1979) has shown in detail.

An approach of this kind means that we can bracket the problem of a possible fit between the Eckhout paintings and some Brazilian Indian tribe, and turn our attention to the forms of representation which the paintings articulate. Before looking at the paintings in detail, however, the question of their alleged naturalism has to be tackled first. After all, if there is on the one hand overwhelming doubt about the existence of a 'Tapuya' culture at all, and if we accept on the other hand the realist interpretation of the paintings which, as we have seen, is advocated by most of the scholars working in this field, what is this real referent of the paintings? If the reality effect they produce cannot be derived from the actual existence of a people called the 'Tapuya', where does it come from?

¹³ The following analysis assumes that the paintings can be treated as a series, i.e. the systems of relations situated there are based on the existence of a relatively defined and delimited system. The paintings of the Black Africans also deserve further study within the broader framework of the iconography of Black Africa (cf. K. George 1958).

We can start by leaving one issue entirely aside for present purposes. We are not concerned with the supposed intentions of the artist, even supposing we could ever ascertain what they were. Reality in painting is an effect. Some paintings come over in what we describe as a realistic or naturalistic way. But they are not dependent for their naturalism on some reality which they set out to portray.¹⁴ Even photographs, which are often used as metaphors for some kind of one-to-one correlation with perceived reality, are not a reflection of reality. They too are imaginary constructs, the product of selection by the eye which perceives in terms of certain preconceptions and the I which never quite knows what to make of the Other.

This all means that the realism of the Eckhout paintings should be seen in isolation from any theory of dependence on ethnographic *realia*. To illustrate, we could take a painting by Jacob van Oost the Elder, depicting a wild man with his prey (fig. 10). Van Oost (1601-1671) is a close contemporary of Albert Eckhout, and the dimensions of his canvas (180cm by 105cm) recall the large-scale Brazilian paintings. What interests us in this work, however, is the fact that the naturalistic style of painting comes close to that of Eckhout, while the portrayed figure is fully imaginary.

The Van Oost painting thus serves both to nuance claims that Eckhout's paintings are so exceptional and to throw doubts on the dependence of such pictorial realism on some ethnographic reality. In a sense, the lack of existence of a 'Tapuya' culture as such is mirrored in the lack of a presence from which the Eckhout paintings might be supposed to draw their reality.

Of course, Eckhout was in Brazil and his portraits must bear some relation to what he saw there. What has to be stressed here, however, is not the nature of that relation, about which we cannot know very much anyway, but the question of how the paintings manage to construct what is a fictional or imaginary world in a plausible way. This shift in emphasis is related to a current tendency in the interpretation of seventeenth century Netherlandish art in general. Recent exhibitions of paintings of Dutch landscapes, cows, etc. stress that in many cases the message is a moral one (see P. Sutton 1984). Landscapes carry symbolic and moral connotations, and cows may serve to symbolise

¹⁴ The distinction between correspondence to existing reality, on the one hand, and to the expectations on the part of the receiving public, on the other hand, goes back at least as far as Aristoteles: see chapter 25 of his *Poetica*.

the well-being of the thriving seventeenth century Dutch economy. One of the most accessible introductions to this field is Simon Schama's *The Embarrassment of Riches*, in which the author sets out to demonstrate the moral lessons which often lie behind seemingly naturalistic, or naturalising, scenes. There is a danger that this kind of interpretation may run wild, and it has been aptly remarked that 'Cheese was rarely consumed on an allegorical level in the seventeenth century' (E. de Jongh, cited in S. Schama 1987: 162). Paradoxically, though, the concern of Northern humanism to infiltrate classical and Christian wisdoms into the business of daily life depended on the artist's skill in depicting everyday reality. As Schama notes (1987: 413): 'It is this delicate tension between necessary means and required ends that makes the judgement of motivation in genre painting so difficult'. In a way, the debate on the admissibility of this kind of symbolic association recalls the anthropological controversy between Claude Lévi-Strauss and Marvin Harris: to paraphrase, are still lives good to think with or good to eat?

At any rate, an awareness of this controversy among art historians might help to sensitise us to the possibility that the naturalistic effect produced by the Eckhout paintings does not exclude a possible symbolic realm of interpretation too.¹⁵ If the realism of Eckhout is not dispassionately observed and secularised naturalism, what are the moral connotations of his paintings?

We can start by comparing the portrait of a 'Tapuya' woman with the portrait of a Tupi woman (figs. 1 and 3). The Tupi woman is clad in a short white skirt; the 'Tapuya' woman is naked, except for an arrangement of leaves covering her pubic area. The Tupi woman carries a child on her arm, from which there also hangs a gourd, while the other arm supports an ornamental basket on her head. The 'Tapuya' woman carries a different load; the basket on her back suspended from a band over her head contains a severed human foot, while in her right hand she holds a severed hand by the wrist. The

¹⁵ Though the present discussion relates the Eckhout paintings to seventeenth century conventions, it should be noted that there are good candidates for the existence of an iconographic double function in the earlier period. For instance, in an important methodological excursus in his catalogue of paintings in the Royal Fine Arts Museum in Antwerp, Paul Vandenbroeck has argued that the Master of Frankfurt's *Schutterfeest*, perhaps dating from 1493, combines realistic and allegorical elements (P. Vandenbroeck 1985: 103a-b). Vandenbroeck also draws attention to the combination of technical waterworks with love allegory in the work of the Master of the Amsterdam Print Cabinet (cf. J. Filedt Kok 1985: 242).

Illustrations

- 1 'Tapuya' woman
- 2 'Tapuya' man
- 3 Tupi woman
- 4 Tupi man
- 5 Mameluca woman
- 6 Mulatto man
- 7 Negro woman
- 8 Negro man
- 9 'Tapuya' dance

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- 10 Wild Man with Prey
Jacob van Oost (1601-1671)
(Kilmarnock, Geneva).

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- 11 "America"
Adriaen Collaert (after Marten de Vos), ca. 1595-1600

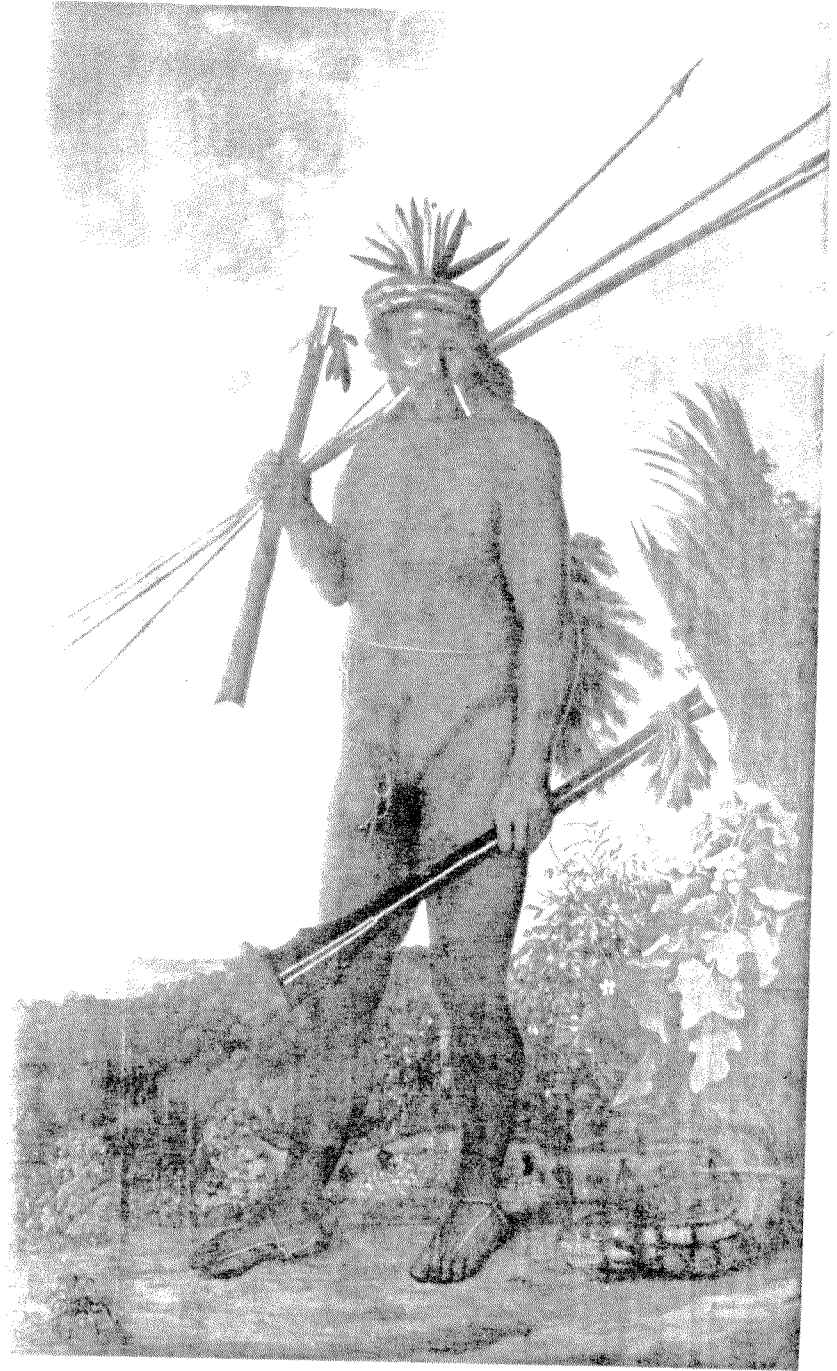
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- 12 Punishment of alleged sodomites by Balboa in the isthmus of Panama in 1513
From: Theodor de Bry, *America IV*, Johannes Wechel, Frankfurt, 1594.

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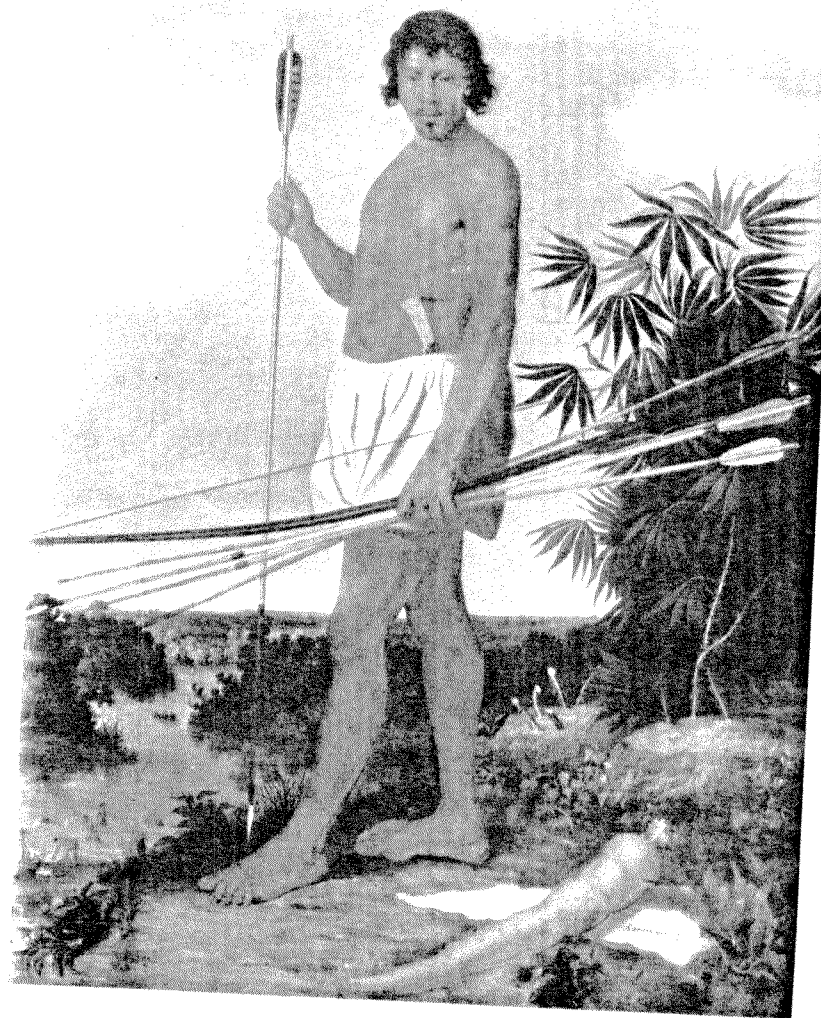
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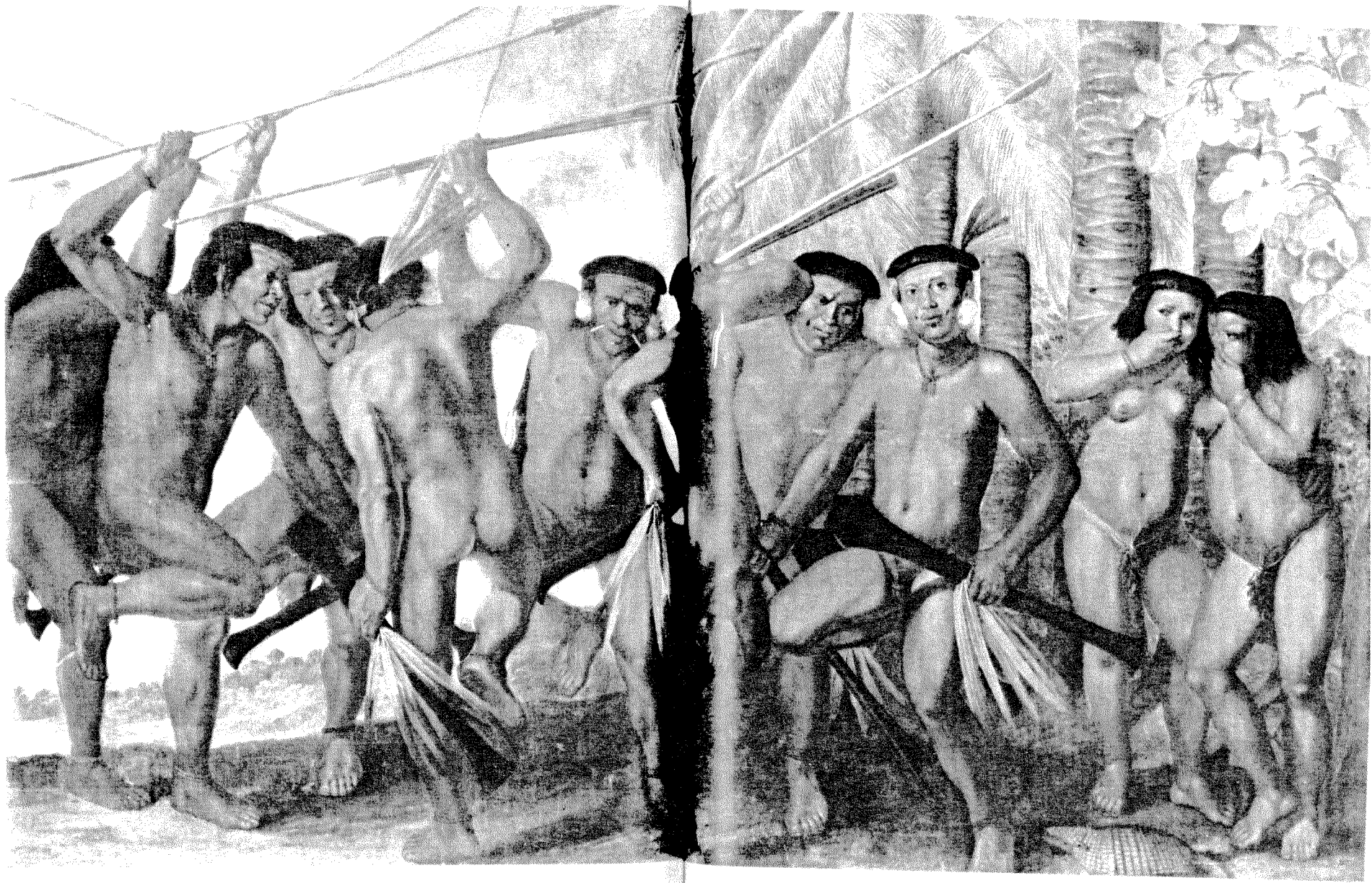


5



6









*Ulla quidem nob' eris, dudum non cognita terra.
hacten' brevis auctoris late celeberrima vena.*

*Visceribus scelerala suis humana recondens
viscera ferali protendit AMERICA lavum.*



contrast between the two figures is further accentuated by the landscapes in the background. While the Tupi woman stands in front of an orderly plantation, the 'Tapuya' woman is in a wild, uncultivated landscape. Furthermore, the armed Indians on the skyline behind her seem intended to relate to warfare and the dismembered limbs that she bears, contrasting with the scene of agricultural prosperity and peace in the Tupi background. The allegorical use of landscape as a form of *paysage moralisé* (cf. E. Panofsky 1962: 64) points up the opposition: the relatively civilised, i.e. westernised Tupi versus the wild and savage 'Tapuya'.

If we look at the male counterparts (figs. 2 and 4) a similar opposition emerges. The 'Tapuya' man is naked, while the Tupi man wears wide-legged shorts. The 'Tapuya' man is armed with four spears, a spear-thrower and a club,¹⁶ while the Tupi man has a bow and five arrows, and moreover carries a wooden-handled metal European knife tucked into his waistband. The 'Tapuya' man is adorned with facial ornaments, a feather headdress and sandals, which create a more primitive appearance than the unadorned, European-looking body of the Tupi man. The opposition is not just a binary one between civilised and uncivilised. The other paintings in the series introduce the possibility of other gradations. There is also the portrait of a Mameluca, a light-skinned woman wearing a long white robe and carrying a bowl of flowers (fig. 5), and the portrait of a Negro woman and child (fig. 7).¹⁷ The Negro woman also carries a basket laden with fruit, and is dressed in a short skirt, with a Dutch clay pipe tucked into the sash, hat and pearl necklace.¹⁸ The existence of the half-blood creates a triad of relations: the 'Tapuya' are wilder than the Tupi, who are in turn less civilised than the mestizos. And the criteria for measuring

¹⁶ Clubs similar but not identical to the one depicted in the painting are preserved in the Ethnographic Collection in Copenhagen: see B. Dam-Mikkelsen & T. Lundbaek (eds.) 1980: 32).

¹⁷ Without going into details, the painting of a light-skinned male, corresponding to the Mameluca woman, and the painting of an African man, who carries a sword of a type known from the Fetu kingdom of the Gold Coast (B. Dam-Mikkelsen & T. Lundbaek (eds.) 1980: 36 & 40), may be assumed to fall into line with this pattern.

¹⁸ The basket and hat are of an oriental type which Dutch merchants had brought from Asia to their allies in the Sonho kingdom at the mouth of the Congo (B. Dam-Mikkelsen & T. Lundbaek (eds.) 1980: 42). Eckhout also painted three portraits of the envoy of the Kingdom of Congo and his travelling companions, who visited Brazil in 1643.

this wildness are precisely their distance from the European I/eye which perceives them.

So far we have left the horizontal painting out of account (fig. 9). It shows a group of eight 'Tapuya' warriors arranged in a circle, stamping the ground and brandishing their spears and clubs, while two women watch from the side. It has been pointed out that the almost identical position of the legs of the eight dancers suggests that the picture was not a spontaneous record from life, but a studio production, reconstructing a scene from the artist's actual experience and based on portrait sketches which he had made over the years (R. Joppien 1979: 303). Perhaps this time lag gave the artist the opportunity to develop some of the connotations of the various components of the scene. For instance, in looking at the two naked women at the edge of the painting, we should bear in mind that in Northern Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nakedness among women tended to be associated with witchcraft. The familiar representations of witches by Hans Baldung Grien and Dürer present them as naked women. Zacharias Wagener, an artist who was already active in Brazil before the arrival of Johan Maurits, and who thus does not belong to the group of artists that the prince took with him, wrote an illustrated manuscript called the *Thierbuch* which has survived as 'one of the most vivid and comprehensive records of the Dutch colony in Brazil during Johan Maurits' reign' (R. Joppien 1979: 319), in which he had no difficulty in attributing devil worship to the 'Tapuya'. Perhaps the gesture of the women ('who seem to be chanting', according to P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 76) might be seen in this light as an incantation.¹⁹ This interpretation of the 'Tapuya' dance as a form of devil worship finds support in the animal depicted in the right-hand corner. The armadillo was known in Dutch as the *schiltvercken*. Now, *vercken* is the word for 'pig', an animal which was assumed to be particularly attractive to devils in European beliefs of the period (E. Evans 1987: 165). Moreover, another of the Netherlands in Brazil, Willem Pies, records that the armadillo was used by Brazilian witches for its magico-medicinal properties (B.-M. Baumunk 1982: 194).

The 'Tapuya' dance thus seems to involve an association with European beliefs about witches. Witches, in turn, were associated with

¹⁹ The meaning of this gesture for the Amerindians themselves is a matter for Amazonian ethnographers. We are here concerned with the meaning that it could have had in the European reception of the painting.

the Greek goddess Artemis, the mistress of the wild trees of the forest, and Diana, the Amazon-like Roman virgin goddess of the hunt who makes her appearance in the medieval hordes of wild women (H. Duerr 1985: 12-15 and Plate 9; C. Ginzburg 1989: 65ff.). Diana was accompanied by her hounds - is it far-fetched to see in this the motive for setting a dog at the feet of the 'Tapuya' woman?

There is another symbolic resonance in the portraits which should not be missed. The painting of a wild man by Jacob van Oost the Elder (fig. 10) was probably one of a series depicting figures from different historical eras. It is possible that the wild man is intended to be a Batavian, one of the primitive inhabitants of the Netherlands. It is worth noting that there was a revival of interest in the early Batavians and early Dutch history during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Grotius' *Liber de Antiquitate Republicae Batavorum* appeared in 1610, and theatrical presentations and paintings of the period harked back to Batavian themes too (S. Schama 1987: 75ff; E. van den Boogaart 1979: 534 n.57 and references there). Illustrations to works dealing with the history of the ancient Teutons were influenced by the iconography of the primitive. The parallelism between primitive Batavians of the past and primitive Brazilians of the present²⁰ has its justification, in the world of European ideas, in the fact that both groups are characterised in terms of remoteness, whether of time or of place. At the junction between the two we can place the boa constrictor in the portrait of the 'Tapuya' man. Whatever relation it may bear to real-life Brazilian serpents, Eckhout must have realised that the placing of a serpent in an uncultivated and primitive landscape was bound to have Christian implications²¹ in addition to its exotic connotations.

These symbolic associations which Eckhout seems to have been making were certainly not novel. The serpent had already appeared in the illustrations to De Bry (B. Bucher 1981: 73ff.), and the armadillo appeared as a symbol of the American continent in a late sixteenth century allegory of America by Adriaen Collaert (after Marten de Vos) (fig.

²⁰ This parallelism conforms to the triangular structure of the late sixteenth century delineated by Harbsmeier, when writing travellers were able to relate the internal others of Europe (peasants, common people, etc.) to Europe's external others (M. Harbsmeier 1987).

²¹ The reference to the story of Adam and Eve is further supported by a carved coconut shell in Copenhagen which depicts 'a Tapuya Adam and Eve standing beside what may be a papaya' (P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 68).

11).²² The cannibalism that is (ethnographically inaccurately) attributed to the 'Tapuya' woman is a stock theme in the iconography of America from Vespucci on, as well as being part of the stock-in-trade for the iconography of witches on the European continent (cf. N. Cohn 1975).

The symbolic connotations of the Eckhout paintings thus seem to combine exoticism and primitivism in linking the Indians of Brazil with wild men and women, witches and primitive Europeans (the Batavians). If we look at these groups, they all have at least one thing in common: they *are* what Europe is *not*. To be more precise, they are a negative self-definition of the European ruling class.

The term 'negative self-definition' is borrowed from the work of Paul Vandebroek, who has published a study of wild men and women, fools, peasants and beggars to demonstrate that the basic point which these types have in common is that they are what the patron or consumer of these visual and textual representations is not. Thus wildness, for example, covers everything that one claims not to be. One's own cultural identity is defined in negative terms by the concept of wildness (P. Vandebroek 1987: 8).

If we attribute the wild men and so on studied by Vandebroek to the realm of popular culture, the same process of negative self-definition is seen to be at work, for *le savoir des gens*, as Foucault called it, is defined by intellectual culture as that which lies outside it. It is:

a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it. (M. Foucault 1980: 82).

Similarly, the Greek tragedians utilised the *barbaroi* in order to define their own Athenian culture (E. Hall 1989). And as Vandebroek points out, anthropology works in the same way: 'The more our culture defines itself as rational, reflexive, scientifically informed, enlightened and individualistic, the more it emphasises the reversal of these

²² Compare the title page to Ulrich Schmidel's *Wahrhaftige Beschreibung der unglückhaften Schiffahrt eines Schiffs von Ambsterdam/die Silberne Welt genannt* (Frankfurt 1604), illustrated as Abbildung 2 in K.-H. Kohl (ed.) (1982).

(genuine or supposed) characteristics among Others' (*ibid.*: 38).²³ Similarly, the anthropocentrism of anthropology may set animals up as the negative self-definition of humanity. The close juxtaposition of animals and humans in the Eckhout paintings may also imply some kind of mental bracketing in which the colonial I is separated off from the exotic, animal-like, primitive Other.²⁴

All the same, the mechanism of 'negative self-definition' itself raises problems of interpretation too. It may be inherently plausible as a means of explaining the generation of certain images, but it is not of much use when it comes to classifying them. Of course, a wide variety of images may be seen as examples of what I am not, as examples of alterity, of otherness, of whatever else we like to call them. But this does not really take us much further. As Vandebroek's study reminds us, we need to know more both about the specific forms and changes through historical time, and about further differentiation within the forms themselves, unless we find it awkward to accept that some others are more other than others.

Methodologically - though this is not the place to go into it in detail - the pinning down of any attempt to tie the concept of negative self-definition firmly to binary oppositional schemes is bound to render it unsuitable for the analysis of alterity in general, and of Eckhout's nine paintings in particular. And more to the point in the present case, it only manages to articulate a gender difference if one presupposes that male is to female as man is to woman as active is to passive... in a series of binary oppositions, which is a presupposition that we should not jump into making (cf. P. Mason 1987a). The male/female opposition is itself historically constituted, so if we are to avoid getting caught up in tautologies, the way forward seems to be the one which entails the reversal and displacement of the hierarchical construction of binary oppositions, a style of work which is known by the name of deconstruction (cf. P. Mason 1990b).

So we return again to the paintings as the visual construction of sexual difference. Following Joan Scott's call to examine the ways in

²³ The same process, but with a reversal of the values implied, can be found in the nostalgic discourse of *Tristes Tropiques*, with its overlay of primitivism, and in the idyllic side of exoticism: in these cases, the primitive and the exotic are once again combined, but this time they are evaluated positively against the negative view of the observer's own society.

²⁴ For examples of the assimilation of Irish, American Indians, women, the poor and so on to an animal state in early modern England, see K. Thomas (1983: 41 ff.).

which gendered identities are substantively constructed and to relate these findings to a range of activities, social organizations, and historically specific cultural representations (1986), we turn to the ways in which the sex of I relates to the desire of the eye of sex and its prurient gaze. The eye and the gaze have come in for a good deal of discussion in the psycho-analytical literature. There is a risk that resorting to these categories will land us in a theory which tends to universalise the categories and relationship of male and female. Moreover, as Joan Scott also points out, if the phallus is the only signifier, 'the process of constructing the gendered subject is, in the end, predictable because always the same' (1986: 1064). Using some of these insights with caution, therefore, we might try to see how they relate, not so much to overall patterns, as to specific effects. If gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power (*ibid.*: 1067), what are its specific effects within the situation of the colonial encounter?

Of the four portraits of females, two include a child. We have become accustomed to characterise images and ideologies relating to women in terms of a Maria/whore opposition, with motherhood belonging firmly on the side of Maria. In the present case, however, the erotic effects of the Negro woman are explicitly accentuated. Her frontal gaze offers her to the eye of the beholder. The firm bared breasts and the short skirt convey an erotic invitation that is confirmed rather than denied by the presence of the half-blood child, who serves as a reminder of the past sexual activities of his mother.²⁵ Iconographically, the ear of corn carried in the child's right hand points literally toward the woman's vagina in an unmistakably phallic gesture,²⁶ reinforced by the child's male gender and clearly delineated genitals, while the bird in his other hand, a red-faced lovebird (*Agapornis pullaria*), points symbolically to the use of the bird as a symbol of lasciviousness and lust in seventeenth century genre representations. In this connection we could point to the slang use of the Dutch word *vogelen* to mean

²⁵ The portrait bears comparison with the series of early twentieth century postcards depicting colonial nudes published by R. Corbey (1988; 1989). These postcards contain a disproportionate number of young women, scarcely dressed, just standing there, looking into the camera, who are always heavily underdressed according to contemporary European standards, with their breasts well visible.

²⁶ As a counterpart, the portrait of the Negro man combines the virility of his pose with the phallic appearance of the date palm trunk (P. Whitehead & M. Boeseman 1989: 74).

copulate (P. Sutton 1984: XXV).²⁷ The portrait of the Mameluca woman represents a more Europeanised sensuality. Her body is fully clothed, with a hint of eroticism in the drawing up of the robe to reveal an ankle, in contrast to the brazen eroticism of the Negro woman. Moreover, the Negro woman has an exotic attribute in the tobacco pipe tucked into her waistband, which, like the bird, is an allusion to sexual activity in Dutch *genre* painting (cf. S. Schama 1987: 204ff.), while the Mameluca has no disturbing features to break the flow of assimilation to European canons of female beauty. Unlike the wild animals surrounding the Tupi and 'Tapuya', she is in the company of frivolous and harmless guinea pigs. Her main attribute - the floral bowl and headband - could just as easily be found in European portraiture.

The Tupi woman is a mother, like the Negro mother, but her child is a girl. The woman herself wears a tunic; her ample breasts are bare, but the presence of the child at the breast deflects their erotic stimulus to replace it with a maternal one. The round forms of the breasts are echoed in the round form of the gourd. By contrast, the phallic gesture in the Negro portrait is reflected in the vegetation too, which is strikingly phallic as well. In short, the aggressive sexuality of the Negro woman that invites the penetration of the male gaze is contrasted with the soft, maternal eroticism of the Tupi mother.

The male counterpart of the Tupi woman is also her complement. As the virile male, he bears the attributes of the hunter (bow, arrows and - European - knife) and has facial hair, while the similarity between his dress and that of the Tupi woman also serves to identify their complementarity as a pair.

Finally - and crucially - we come to the 'Tapuya' pair. The woman is no longer frontal, but in a three-quarter pose. This involves a deflection of her gaze - she does not offer herself to the observer - and gives her added substantiality by stressing the third dimension. She has no child, but the amputated hand that she carries in her right hand has an unnaturally erect position in line with her genitals which gives her a phallic aspect, emphasised too by the upward slanting direction of her 'fig-leaf'. Moreover, she is in motion. Unlike the static frontal poses of the other women, her poised position suggests the movement befitting a goddess of the chase, if we follow up the Diana connotations of the

²⁷ On a painting from the mid-1660s, Nicolaes Berchem depicted a Moor presenting a parrot to a lady, in which exoticism and eroticism are combined.

dog at her feet. In short, a classic representation of the phallic, castrating, aggressive female familiar from the psycho-analytic literature.

And what of her mate? The 'Tapuya' man is curiously static, frozen in a 'female' frontal pose. He is more naked than the woman, his only items of clothing being a pair of string sandals and a cord binding his penis. The contrast at the ethnozoological level is significant too. The dog at the woman's feet may seem to emphasise her aggressiveness. In the case of the 'Tapuya' man, there are two creatures present. The snake, as we have seen, cannot fail to have Biblical connotations, so here it reminds us of the Garden of Eden scenario in which the man emerges as the weak partner, who loses all because of the effects upon him of the woman. As if to underscore this unmaning, the bird spider on his other side is also associated with the *vagina dentata* in the psycho-analytical literature, the devouring female who entices the male into her snares before deceiving and castrating him (cf. P. Mason 1983). In harmony with this we can also contrast the binding of the man's penis, i.e. the restriction of his libido, with the phallic assertiveness of the woman's 'fig-leaf'. To sum up, the 'Tapuya' couple represent the nightmares of psycho-analysis - the castrating, aggressive, active female and the (symbolically) castrated and unmanned male.

Of course, very few of these details taken in isolation would be convincing. It is by juxtaposing the eight portraits that we can detect a systemicity, the play of oppositions at work, and the coherence of the gendered representations that they portray to us. However, they also show us how inadequate a simple notion of negative self-definition would be to catch the subtle interplay of allusion and connotation. The representations have deep semantic resonances that are not amenable to analysis solely in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic chains.²⁸ And - most importantly - these allusions are gender-specific.

If we are to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of Freudian universalising and neutered generalisation, we are obliged to focus on the specifically historical aspect of this construction of gender. What is it about Dutch/Brazilian relations in the seventeenth century which makes the effects of these paintings plausible? In what way do they achieve their reality effect without straining credulity? And in what ways is this effect gender-specific?

²⁸ Or as Roy Wagner recently commented on the use of semiotics: 'such an approach [involving the subordination of meaning to signs] is apt to constrain the meaning of naming things within the naming of meanings' (R. Wagner 1986: x).

We approach this question by means of a brief detour. In the analysis by Bernadette Bucher of the 13 volumes of *Great Voyages* issued by the De Bry family between 1590 and 1634, she relates variations in the portrayal of Amerindians to their socio-political relations with the Europeans. She draws attention to the inversion of sexual traits in the portrayal of Amerindian men and women, and notes:

The two ambiguous figures assume the aspect of an inverted or transvestite couple each time the Amerindian world appears vanquished by the Protestant conquerors. But their sexual inversion, which would entail the sterility and extinction of the Amerindian, gradually disappears as they successfully resist and drive off the conquerors. Finally, the two figures lose their sexual ambiguity altogether, and their portrait even overstates their sexual attributes. They fall into the category of the monstrous hybrid, the most "outside Nature". (B. Bucher 1981: 162-163).

Sexual inversion thus serves two functions. Firstly, as a negation of the European mores, it is an example of negative self-definition: the Amerindians are assimilated to the sexual deviants who were similarly extruded from the European core. We should not forget that the persecution of homosexuals in Europe at the time had its counterpart in the brutal act by which the conquistadors cast twenty Cueva Indians to a pack of bulldogs in 1513 on a charge of sodomy (first recorded in Petrus Martyr, and illustrated in De Bry (fig. 12)). On the other hand, the 'Tapuya' woman deviates from the more Europeanised portraits of the other Brazilian women precisely in terms of her Amazon-like aggressiveness. The dread of Amazons is a feature of the earliest accounts of America, especially Vespucci's extensive misogynist remarks on the cruelty and lasciviousness of Amerindian women, who used to get venomous insects to bite the genitals of their menfolk to cause them to swell, sometimes leading to a castration of the male (A. Vespucci 1984: 100). The fear of these castrating fiends also emerges from the account of the attack by a group of women on a young man who went on land during Vespucci's third voyage. The scene is vividly portrayed in a series of woodcuts, where the native women seduce the member of the crew while their colleagues prepare the ambush with a massive club. In a telling detail, the last we see of their unfortunate victim is his buttocks protruding from a cave, with anal

connotations which suggest further sexual perversion on the part of the women.²⁹ Moreover, inversion in this female field cannot help recalling the important role played by inversion in the portrayal of European witches (see, for instance, H. Duerr 1985: 46-47; R. Needham 1978: 41).

Inversion and excess are both terms which admit of an exclusively European definition, of course. These excessively aggressive females and excessively unmanly males are only so in terms of the European I which defines them in terms of an inversion of or excessive deviation from the European standards, in the same way that a later discourse was to contrast both the excessive size of the African penis and the excessive smallness of the Asian penis with the 'perfect' dimensions of the European prototype.

The inverted representation of the Amerindian world served not only to classify its inhabitants as others in terms of Europe. It also suggested that intervention by Europe was needed to restore the proper balance by turning everything the right way round. Europe would have to take the initiative in hunting and capture if the Amerindian world was to avoid falling into a sterile state of stasis. Amazon-like women would have to be tamed. As Jean de Léry records, the Tupinamba slaves in Brazil had to be whipped before they would reject their nudity and put on European clothes (cf. P. Mason 1991).

Just how objectionable the effeminate males and aggressive females were in European eyes can be gauged in terms of their opposition to the European scheme of things itself. Colonial discourse first presupposes a split between land and its inhabitants, and then assumes that the conquerable territory is sparsely populated and undercultivated. This in turn is used to justify the intervention of the Europeans to ensure that the qualities of the land are brought to fruition. If the task cannot be entrusted to effeminate Amerindian males (and Amerindian females do not enter the picture here), it will have to be overseen by their European superiors.

Within colonial onomastics, the New World was female. The name America, like Africa, Europe, Florida, Virginia and so on, has a feminine ending. At a scopic level, this so-called virgin territory, in its feminine vulnerability, invites the gaze of colonial power to penetrate and fertilise it. The representation of the world is not seen as a ques-

tion of contiguity and measurement, but the world is a terrain waiting to be perused, scrutinised and penetrated. The nude women were both a symbol of this world that was to be appropriated and a part of it - both metaphor and metonym. From the colonial point of view, the virgin land is spread out like a woman's body, inviting the colonist to take possession of it. This is one of the basic tropes of colonial discourse. And it is why the sexual inversion of the Amerindians is so scandalous in European eyes. It threatens to disrupt the sexual matrix which is both presupposition and justification of colonial intervention and domination.

As we saw above, the 'Tapuya'/Tupi distinction can be couched in terms of the degree of resistance to European violation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find accounts of Tupi young women which give us a picture of the scopic desires of the Europeans themselves - these are the malleable women they were after:

There were among them [Tupi] three or four girls, very young and very pretty, with very dark hair, long over the shoulders, and their privy parts so high, so closed, and so free from hair that we felt no shame in looking at them very well. (Vaz de Caminha, cited in K. Pedersen 1987: 398).

The contrast between these pin-ups and the 'Tapuya' woman painted by Eckhout is striking. The objects of the erotised desires of these European observers do not disturb their fantasies as long as they remain passive, but the colonial observers see the object of their desires turn into a monster once it acts as a subject (cf. P. Mason 1990a: Ch. 8).

European discourse could not get a hold on America before the opacity of the New World was broken. The New World had to learn to speak the same language and play the same game (cf. F. Lestringant 1987). Eckhout's 'Tapuya' portraits belong to this historical juncture. In portraying the 'Tapuya' in resistance to European sexual mores, Eckhout conjured up a vision of what Europe could not tolerate, neither among its 'inner Indians' (cf. P. Mason 1987b) nor among its overseas contacts. The portrayal of the 'Tapuya' betrays the thrust of colonial desire, eager to use its penetrating gaze to reduce the Other to Self, bent on using its eye to extend the dissemination of its power.

²⁹ These woodcuts are reproduced as Abbildung 218a-c in K. -H. Kohl (ed.) 1982.

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Sorcery and Law in Modern Cameroon

Cyprian F. Fisiy and Michael Rowlands

Introduction

Beliefs in witchcraft and other sources of mystical power occupy a central place in discussions of African cosmologies and religious practices. What is often stressed is the role of such beliefs in the quite practical context of explaining misfortune, personal failure, death and disease. Fear of the malevolent actions of others through witchcraft can instigate uncontrollable violence in retaliation. Hence it is not surprising that in the integument of concrete acts of violence, it has often been found difficult to distinguish the actions of the supposed witch/sorcerer from the witchcraft accuser, the diviner and others involved in protecting the person or the community from malevolent actions. Irrespective of any personal faith or belief in the existence of witchcraft, a perception of threat to public order and the authority of the State, has been the consensus on which colonial and postcolonial law in many African settings has been directed towards dealing with accusations of witchcraft. In the case of Cameroon, just after independence, the Penal Code was drafted to include under section 2 the following provision:

Whoever commits any act of witchcraft, magic or divination to disturb public order or tranquility or to harm another in his person, property or substance, whether by taking a reward or otherwise, shall be punished with imprisonment from two to ten years and with a fine of five thousand to one hundred thousand fr

This statute, still in force, prohibits all acts to do with witchcraft, magic, divination, as well as witchcraft itself as similar in their propensity to disturb the peace, hence equally reprehensible and to be treated in the same manner. It was surprising therefore to find that in the last five years or so, an increasing number of cases have been brought before the Courts of Appeal in Cameroon which deal specifically with witchcraft.